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# Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 101025Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7327
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 2715

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AF
SUBJECT: AFTER DAOUD: IS A PEACEFUL SUCCESSION IN THE CARDS?

1. THIS CABLE CONSTITUTES THE SUMMARY CHAPTER OF AN EMBASSY STUDY OF THE SUCCESSION QUESTION IN AFGHANISTAN. THE FINAL STUDY IS BEING TRANSMITTED BY AIRGRAM.

2. INTRODUCTION: AFGHANISTAN'S PRESIDENT MOHAMMAD DAOUD APPEARS TO ENJOY GOOD HEALTH, AND HE HAS FIVE MORE YEARS REMAINING OF HIS CONSTITUTIONALLY MANDATED TERM OF OFFICE. NEVERTHELESS, DAOUD'S AGE (69), THE QUICKENING IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS POLITICAL PROGRAM FOR THIS COUNTRY, AND AFGHANISTAN'S LONG TRADITION OF COUPS AND ASSASSINATIONS, SUGGEST THAT POLITICAL CHANGE COULD OCCUR WITH LITTLE WARNING. THUS, THE SUCCESSION ISSUE IS A GERMANE ONE.

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2. THE RELATIVE DEARTH OF PROMINENT POLITICAL FGIURES WHO

COULD READILY STEP INTO ANY VACATED PRESIDENTIAL SHOES INDICATES THAT AFGHANISTAN MAY EXPERIENCE A SUCCESSION STRUGGLE WHOSE OUTCOME WILL ULTIMATELY BE DECIDED BY THE INTERPLAY OF VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS RATHER THAN BY ANY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL ABLE TO DOMINATE EVENTS. PROMINENT AMONG SUCH GROUPS -- AND THEIR

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CURRENTLY LEADING CONTENDERS FOR DAOUD'S MANTEL -- ARE: THE "CENTRIST" MILITARY, REPRESENTED BY NATIONAL DEFENSE MINISTER GHULAM HAIDER RASSULI; THE MOHAMMADZAI CLAN "ESTABLISHMENT," REPRESENTED PRINCIPALLY (WITHIN AFGHANISTAN) BY DAOUD'S BROTHER MOHAMMAD NAIM; AND, THE CONSERVATIVE MILITARY, POSSIBLY REPRESENTED BY THE EXILED MOHAMMADZAI EX-GENERAL ABDUL WALI, WHO MIGHT ALSO FORGE A CANDIDACY BASED ON SOME CENTRIST SUPPORT. DAOUD'S OWN APPARENT CHOICE, VICE PRESIDENT SYED ABDULILAH, APPEARS TO POSSESS LITTLE INDEPENDENT POLITICAL SUPPORT, BUT HIS CHANCES SHOULD IMPROVE THE LONGER HE IS IN THE NUMBER TWO POSITION.

4. NEITHER THE ORGANIZED LEFT NOR THE REACTIONARY, RELIGIOUS, AND LANDOWNING RIGHT APPEARS TO HAVE IDENTIFIABLE CANDIDATES AT THIS TIME, AND NEITHER ELEMENT WILL PROBABLY FURNISH DAOUD'S SUCCESSOR. HOWEVER, THE ORGANIZED LEFT, DUE TO ITS RELATIVELY GREATER EFFICIENCY AND EXPERIENCE, COULD CONCEIVABLY PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE SUCCESSION CONTEST, WITH OR WITHOUT SOVIET BACKING. THE REACTIONARY RIGHT CONSTITUTES THE COUNTRY'S SINGLE INTEREST GROUP, AND, EVEN THOUGH THE RIGHT PROBABLY WILL NOT UNITE BEHIND ANY SPECIFIC CONTENDER, THIS GROUP'S ROLE WILL BE CRUCIAL NONETHELESS, BECAUSE, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, NO CANDIDATE CAN ATTAIN OR MAINTAIN LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF RIGHTIST OPPOSITION.

5. THE IMMEDIATE POST-DAOUD PERIOD. WERE DAOUD TO DIE IN OFFICE,
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WE WOULD ANTICIPATE A BRIEF CARETAKER GOVERNMENT UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DAOUD'S BROTHER MOHAMMAD NAIM, WHOSE PRESTIGE AND MOHAMMADZAI CREDENTIALS MAKE HIM ACCEPTABLE TO ALMOST ALL COMPETING GROUPS, BUT WHOSE AGE (APPROXIMATELY 68) EXCLUDES HIM AS A LIKELY LONG-TERM SUCCESSOR. A NAIM GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE FORGED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GENERAL RASSULI, THE PRESENT DOMINANT MILITARY LEADER AND A MOHAMMADZAI,WHOSE AMBITIONS ARE UNCLEAR BUT PROBABLY INCLUDE THE PRESIDENCY. ASIDE FROM THE PATRICIAN NAIM, NO OTHER INDIVIDUAL APPEARS TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF THE IN-COUNTRY MOHAMMADZAI CLAN. NONETHELESS, GIVEN THE PRESTIGE AND EDUCATIONAL/CAREER ADVANTAGES THE MOHAMMADZAIS ENJOY, WE ANTICIPATE THAT THE EVENTUAL SUCCESSOR WILL HAVE SOME FAMILIAL LINKS TO THE CLAN.

6. THE INCREASINGLY PROMINANT POLITICAL FIGURE IS 33-YEAR OLD VICE-PRESIDENT ABDULILAH, HIMSELF A MOHAMMADZAI, DAOUD'S DE FACTO ADOPTED SON, AND SEEMINGLY THE PERSON CHOSEN BY THE PRESIDENT AS HIS SUCCESSOR. ABDULILAH'S CHANCES SHOULD IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY THE LONGER DAOUD REMAINS IN OFFICE AND GROOMS HIM AS HIS PROTEGE AND SUCCESSOR. ABDULILAH ALSO NEEDS A FEW MORE YEARS UNDER HIS BELT TO BECOME MORE ACCEPTABLE AS A LEADER IN THIS SOCIETY WHERE AGE IS RESPECTED.

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7. FORCES OF THE RIGHT. THE REACTIONARY RIGHT POSES THE GREATEST IMMEDIATE AND POTENTIAL THREAT TO DAOUD'S REGIME, AS IT HAS TO AFGHANISTAN'S PREVIOUS "REFORMIST" GOVERNMENTS. EVEN THOUGH THE REACTIONARY RELIGIOUS AND LANDOWNING ELEMENTS WILL PROBABLY NOT SUPPLY DAOUD'S SUCCESSOR, THESE FACTIONS WILL AFFECT THE OUTCOME OF THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE BY CREATING SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES TO THE ACCESSION OF A CANDIDATE DEEMED IDEOLOGICALLY OR POLITICALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE MASS OF THE AFGHAN POPULACE (WHICH IS VERY CONSERVATIVE).

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 2715

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

8. AT THE MOMENT, WE DISCERN LITTLE SUPPORT, EVEN AMONG RIGHTIST ELEMENTS, FOR A RESTORATION OF THE PRE-COUP MONARCHY, HEADED BY EXILED KING ZAHIR. HOWEVER, IT IS CONCEIVABLE, THOUGH NOT LIKELY, THAT AMBITIOUS, TOUGH, EXILED EX-GENERAL ABDUL WALI (A FIRST COUSIN OF DAOUD) COULD ATTAIN POWER AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE WITH MOHAMMADZAI CREDENTIALS, OR ON THE SHOULDERS OF A SEMI-ROYALIST MILITARY MOVEMENT. IN EITHER CASE, IT WOULD LIKELY BE AS A "LAST RESORT" CANDIDATE, CALLED UPON BY THE CENTER OR MOHAMMADZAI CLANSMEN, TO PRECLUDE POLITICAL CHAOS OR LEFTIST THREAT.

9. THE LEFTIST CHALLENGE. THE EXTENT TO WHICH DAOUD TEMPORARILY LEANED ON LEFT-WING FORCES WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE MILITARY TO

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RETURN TO POWER IN 1973 IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF ANY ANALYSIS
OF THE POST-DAOUD PERIOD. ALTHOUGH DAOUD HAS VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED
THIS FACTION FROM MEANINGFUL POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE, THESE LEFT-
WING FORCES HAVE BEEN VERY ACTIVE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE
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DAOUDIST "MOVEMENT" AND COULD STILL PLAY SOME POST-DAOUD ROLE.
A FEW MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP WERE, FOR EXAMPLE, RECENTLY APPOINTED
TO THE HIGH COUNCIL OF THE ARMED FORCES, WHICH COULD INDICATE
THEY MAY STILL POSSESS AN ELEMENT OF POWER. THE RECENTLY
REORGANIZED PRO-SOVIET "KHALQ" ("MASSES") PARTY IS PROBABLY THE
BEST ORGANIZED AND MOST EXPERIENCED POLITICAL FORCE IN THE
COUNTRY EVEN THOUGH STILL VERY SMALL IN NUMBERS.

10. NEVERTHELESS, WE CANNOT IDENTIFY ANY SIGNIFICANT LEFTIST
CANDIDATES WHO MIGHT REPLACE DAOUD, EITHER IN THE NEAR OR LONG-
TERM. WHILE LARGE NUMBERS OF AFGHAN MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE BEEN
EXPOSED TO SOVIET TRAINING IN THE USSR OR HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH
SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS IN AFGHANISTAN, IT IS UNKNOWN HOW MANY
MAY HAVE BECOME MARXIST OR PRO-SOVIET. GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S
ANTI-COMMUNIST LEANINGS, THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO EXPRESS LEFT-
WING VIEWS AT THE PRESENT TIME. HOWEVER, ONE OR MORE OF THESE
OFFICES COULD EMERGE FROM OBSCURITY WITH REMARKABLE RAPIDITY
IN AN UNSTABLE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, AND WE, THEREFORE,
BELIEVE THAT ANY POST-DAOUD SUCCESSION, WHICH IS NOT QUICKLY
RESOLVED IN FAVOR OF "CENTRIST" -- MILITARY OR CIVILIAN --
LEADERSHIP, COULD LEAD TO A SITUATION WHEREIN THE FORCES OF THE
LEFT COULD PLAY A STRONG ROLE.

11. IMPACT ON UNITED STATES INTERESTS. A PROLONGED OR VIOLENT
CONTEST FOR POWER ADVERSELY AFFECT OUR INTEREST IN REGIONAL
STABILITY BY THREATENING THE INDEPENDENCE AND COHESION OF
AFGHANISTAN. CONVERSELY, A QUICK SUCCESSION

BY A MODERATELY
CENTRIST LEADER, SUCH AS NAIM, OR RASSULI -- THE MOST PROBABLE
EVENTUALITY AT THIS TIME, WOULD LIKELY POSE NO PROBLEMS FOR
U.S. INTERESTS. (THE SOVIETS COULD POSSIBLY ALSO LIVE WITH
SUCH A SOLUTION.)
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12. CONCLUSIONS: GIVEN THE TRADITIONAL AND CONSERVATIVE
MAKE-UP OF MUSLIM AFGHANISTAN, AS WELL AS THE FACTS OF AFGHAN
POLITICAL LIFE SINCE THE 1973 COUP AND ELIKI STION OF THE MONARCHY,

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THE ULTIMATE SUCCESSOR TO DAOUD WILL PROBABLY EMERGE FROM THE POLITICALLY "CENTRIST" GROUPS, SUCH AS THE MILITARY, OR THE CIVILIAN "ESTABLISHMENT" (I.E., THE MOHAMMADZAI CLAN). THE INHERENT POWER OF THE MILITARY -- MANY OF WHOSE LEADERS ARE ALSO MOHAMMADZAIS -- NOT SURPRISINGLY GIVES THE MILITARY THE INSIDE TRACK, ALTHOUGH OTHER PRESSURE GROUPS COULD CONCEIVABLY FIELD SOLID CONTENDERS, PROVIDED THEY COULD ELICIT SOME MILITARY SUPPORT. WERE GENERAL RASSULI TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE MOVE TO SEIZE POWER, FOLLOWING DAOUD, WE QUESTION THAT HE HAS THE QUALITIES THAT WOULD ENABLE HIM TO REMAIN IN POWER. A LONG-TERM LEADER WILL, IN OUR VIEW, EMERGE ONLY AFTER A PERIOD OF PULLING AND HAULING AMONG THE MANY INTEREST GROUPS HERE.

13. THE POTENTIAL LEVELS OF VIOLENCE WHICH MIGHT EXPLODE FOLLOWING DAOUD'S DEPARTURE COULD WELL BE DETERMINED BY ACTIONS AND CHOICES WHICH DAOUD HIMSELF TAKES DURING THE UNKNOWN TIME LEFT TO HIM. AN ORDERLY SUCCESSION WILL THUS DEPEND ON DAOUD'S ABILITY TO CONVINCE COMPETING GROUPS THAT THE DIRECTION IN WHICH HE HAS SET FOR AFGHAN DEVELOPMENT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE INTERESTS OF ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY, AND THAT VIOLENT INTERNECINE CONFLICT SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.ELIOT

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